DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 040 EC 307 503

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Whitworth, Jerry |
| TITLE | Seven Steps to Successful Inclusion. |
| PUB DATE | 1999-11-00 |
| NOTE | 10p. |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Disabilities; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Instructional Leadership; *Principals; Program Design; *Program Implementation; School Administration; *Teacher Collaboration; Training Methods |

ABSTRACT

This report highlights the experiences of the Lighthouse Project, which successfully included students with disabilities in elementary, middle, and high school general education classes in a school district in southwest Tennessee. Drawing on findings from the Lighthouse Project, the report describes the following seven steps that must be present if a school is to move from exclusive to inclusive practices· (1) someone at the building level must assume a leadership role and that person should be the building's principal; (2) the school must develop a common vision and all members of the school community must understand why inclusion is being implemented; (3) adequate time must be given to the process of planning inclusion and this planning must continue during the implementation phase; (4) there must be a collaborative sprit and atmosphere within the school; (5) provisions must be made for formal as well as informal communication, and personnel in the school must work at the communication process; (6) teachers, administrators, and support staff must be flexible and capable of adapting and changing to meet the needs of children; and (7) training must be providing to faculty and staff on inclusive practices. (Contains 22 references.) (CR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 436 040

# SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION

By

JERRY WHITWORTH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Whitworth

1

EC 307503



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Seven Steps to Successful Inclusion

*More powerful than an army's march is an idea whose time has come.*

*-Victor Hugo*

**Introduction**

A powerful idea that is now marching through our schools is inclusion, and it promises to change the landscape of public education forever. Many writers have identified this as one of the most challenging, controversial and confusing issues in education today (Putnam, Spiegel, and Bruininks 1995; Stainback and Stainback 1994; Ferguson 1995).

The concept of inclusion places the emphasis on changing the system rather than the child. The argument is that the structure and practices of our educational system need to shift and become more flexible, more inclusive, and more collaborative in order to better accommodate students with learning differences.

This argument is based on several points:

1. Research indicates the relative ineffectiveness of pull-out programs as a viable approach to teaching children with disabilities (Will 1986; Affleck, Madge, Adams, and Lowenbraum 1988; Semmel, Gottlieb, and Robinson 1979; Roach 1995).
2. The current dual system of educating students with disabilities in a separate setting results in fragmented, disjointed programming that minimizes communication between regular and special education teachers and harms education for students with disabilities and students without disabilities (Bilken and Zollers 1986; Gartner and Lipsky 1987; 1989; Lilly 1987; 1988; Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg 1987).
3. Philosophically there is a movement toward a more inclusive society that does not separate and segregate individuals based on differences, either real or perceived. Inclusion proponents argue that our schools must mirror this inclusive, diverse society (Bilken and Knoll 1987; Gartner and Lipsky 1987; Giangreco and Putnam 1991).
4. Practices in many schools are demonstrating that teaching all students together in general education settings can be done successfully if appropriate practices and methods are used (Banerji and Daily 1995; Bishop 1995; Davis 1995).

To be sure, there are voices to be heard on the other side. Some writers have noted that including all children with disabilities in general education classes presents some serious challenges (Fuchs and Fuchs 1991; Kauffman, Gerber, and Semmel 1988; Walker and Bullis 1991). But, regardless of how one feels about the issue of inclusion, we must accept the fact that it is here to stay. The range of diversity in our schools has increased dramatically and will continue to do so in the decades to come.

As Hallahan and Kauffman (1994, 46) conclude,

"No matter whose point of view ultimately prevails, it is fair to say that there will be dramatic changes over the next few years in how, and especially where, we educate students with disabilities."

The focus now must center on how to implement inclusion successfully so that it results in improved educational quality for all students. We must explore and identify means and methods to establish more inclusive educational communities.

**The Lighthouse Project**

Through a three-year project one school district in southwest Tennessee has been working successfully to develop inclusive schools. With funding provided by the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, the Jackson-Madison County School District has established one lighthouse school each year at three levels, elementary, middle, and high school. The purpose of the lighthouse schools is to serve as beacons for other schools wishing to become more inclusive.

The approach used to develop these lighthouse schools was based on the project developers' experience in working with inclusion in four different states. After extensive experience with successful and unsuccessful inclusion attempts in Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Tennessee, it was our conclusion that there are certain key elements or steps that must be present if a school is to move from exclusive to inclusive practices. Seven of these steps were identified and carefully incorporated into each lighthouse school.

**Leadership**

Leadership is an important first step for inclusion. Someone at the building level must assume the leadership role and that person should be the building's principal. Rarely have we

seen a school be successful in implementing inclusion without strong, dynamic leadership from the principal. Leadership from the central office level is good, and you need teachers and other staff members who will assist with leadership efforts, but the principal must be at the front, leading the way.

One cautionary note, though, and it is a big one. This leadership must not be top down. Inclusion cannot be implemented successfully with one person deciding it should be done and how it should be done. As we will talk about later, leadership must be collaborative, and it must involve all of those individuals who will have a part in the inclusion efforts.

**Vision**

Once leadership is in place the school must develop a common vision. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that, "He who understands the why can bear with almost any how. " It is important for all members of the school community to understand why inclusion is being implemented, and that "why" must focus on children. It must be good for children, and everyone involved in education in that school must understand that and be committed to it.

In the lighthouse schools a great deal of time was spent on developing a common vision for the school. This was done through discussions, readings, watching videotapes, listening to speakers, and visiting other programs. But, mainly it was accomplished by getting faculty, staff, parents, and members of the community to set down together and talk about what they wanted for their children. This vision, then, became the standard for all subsequent decisions and actions.

Note, though, that vision must be developed collaboratively. If everyone is to be committed to the vision all must have a part in its development. It must be everyone's vision.

**Planning**

Many an attempt at inclusion has been derailed due to inattention to this step. Many schools leap into inclusion without really understanding what they are doing or how they are going to do it. In such a situation confusion and chaos usually reign and failure is almost always the result. Adequate time must be given to the process of planning.

There are two important aspects of this planning that need to be observed.

1. First, it must be done both prior to and during implementation.
2. Second, everyone must be involved in the planning process.

This requires time to be spent beforehand talking about what is going to be done and how it will be done; identifying possible problems and possible solutions to those problems; planning for resources, discussing roles and responsibilities, and many other issues.

This planning must also continue during the implementation phase as well to address problems that will naturally occur and to monitor the effectiveness of activities designed to facilitate inclusive practices. In the lighthouse schools time was scheduled every week for faculty and staff to meet and talk about problems and issues, as well as to share successes with one another.

**Collaboration**

There must also be a collaborative spirit and atmosphere within the school. True collaboration goes beyond simple cooperation and involves all members of the school community working together collaboratively to achieve their common vision. This means that everyone shares responsibilities and resources, that faculty and staff are willing to change and exchange roles when necessary, and that concerns about territory and "turf" are set aside.

This can be a difficult step for some in the school to take. Positions, job descriptions, resources, titles, privileges, are all things that often have not been easily gained and are not easily relinquished. But, an atmosphere of collaboration must prevail. And it must not be mere lip service to collaboration. Everyone in the school must be truly committed to collaborative activities. For instance, teachers must be willing to share their classrooms with other teachers. Support staff must be willing to share their expertise and resources with the classroom teacher. Administrators must be willing to share their decision-making authority.

Collaboration can go against the grain of the educational structure and the training of school personnel. Support may be necessary to give faculty and staff the skills in collaboration that they will need. But, true collaboration begins with everyone willing to sit down to talk and work together to accomplish their common vision.

**Communication**

As you can see from our discussion of the previous steps, an important practice for any school wishing to become more inclusive is communication. Provisions must be made for formal as well as informal communication, and personnel in the school must work at the communication process. Time must be scheduled on a regular basis for faculty and staff to talk and to continue to build on their vision, as well as to discuss specific issues. It may also be necessary for faculty and staff receive to training in effective communication skills.

In addition to a formal mechanism, there must be informal mechanisms in place as well to allow and encourage frequent and open communication. This can be done by establishing an environment where everyone in the school community shares responsibility for communication and where everyone is committed to insuring that the process is productive and effective. The means for doing this will vary from school to school depending upon conditions and situations, and it is an issue that should be addressed in the planning process.

**Flexibility**

Inherent in the inclusive school is the capacity for change. Implementing inclusive practices requires that schools fundamentally change the way they operate. In order for that to occur teachers, administrators, and support staff must be flexible, capable of adapting and changing to meet the needs of children. The reason we have the dual system of regular/special education that has developed in this country is due to the relative lack of flexibility on the part of schools. Rather than change schools to meet the needs of students who don't fit the system, we simply created a separate system.

Our experience with schools that have been successful with inclusion emphasizes the importance of flexibility and change. Inclusion cannot be just another program, an appendage attached to an organization already weighed down with a multiplicity of such appendages. Inclusion requires restructuring and reconceptualizing education. It requires change.

This change has to occur at the building level, so that the culture of that school is different, but it must also occur at the individual classroom level. Teachers and support staff must have the flexibility to modify and adapt their curriculum, their techniques, their physical environment, and their classroom activities, to stretch their capacity for dealing with a wider

range of diverse needs and abilities.

**Training**

A final step for successfully implementing inclusive practices is training. Faculty and staff should not be expected to do what they have not been trained to do. The lighthouse schools developed a training program that had the following components:

Based on identified needs

Flexible

Practical

Collaboratively developed

Integrated

The faculty and staff collaboratively determined what kind of training they needed and how that training could be best provided in their particular situation. The format was flexible enough to fit the unique needs of the school. In addition, training activities focused on practical skills that school personnel could use and that could be integrated into the classroom. Staff development in the Lighthouse Project focused on assisting all staff members in developing skills to teach students in inclusive settings.

**Conclusion**

As our society changes, so must our schools. The 21st Century will see schools that are more diverse, and that include all students in flexible, collaborative environments designed to help each student achieve his or her potential in an inclusive setting. This will require a different kind of school. It will also require educators committed to, and knowledgeable about, inclusive practices, working with parents and the community to make the promise of successful learning a reality for all students.

**References**

Banerji, M. and Daily, R.A. 1995. A study of the effects of an inclusion model on students with specific learning disabilities. Journal of Learning Disabilities 28(8): 511.

Bilken, D. and Zollers, N. 1986. The focus of advocacy in the LD field. Journal of Learning Disabilities 19: 579-586.

Bishop, M. 1995. Inclusion: Balancing the ups and downs. Momentum 26(3): 28-30.

Davis, S. 1995. Report card on inclusion in the education of students with mental retardation. Arlington, TX: The ARC.

Ferguson, D.L. 1995. The real challenge of inclusion: Confessions of a "rabid inclusionist." Phi Delta Kappan 77(4): 281-87.

Gartner, A. and Lipsky, D.K. 1987. Beyond special education: Toward a quality system for all students. Harvard Educational Review 57: 367-385.

Gartner, A. and Lipsky, D.K. 1989. The yoke of special education: How to break it. Rochester, NY: National Center on Education and the Economy.

Giangreco, M. and Putnam, J. 1991. Supporting the education of students with severe disabilities in regular education environments. In Critical issues in the lives of people with severe disabilities, ed. L.H. Meyer, C. Peck, and L. Brown , 245-270. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Hallahan, D.P. and Kauffman, J.M. 1994. Exceptional children: Introduction to special education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Lilly, M.S. 1987. Lack of focus on special education in literature on educational reform. Exceptional Children 53: 325-26.

Lilly, M.S. 1988. The regular education initiative: A force for change in general and special education. Education and Training in Mental Retardation 23: 253-60.

Pugach, M. C. and Allen-Meares, P. 1985. Collaboration at the preservice level: Instructional and evaluation activities. Teacher Education and Special Education 8: 3-11.

Putnam, J.W., Spiegel, A.N., and Bruininks, R.H. 1995. Future directions in education and inclusion of students with disabilities: A Delphi investigation. Exceptional Children 61(6): 553.

Reynolds, M., Wang, M. and Walberg, H. 1987. The necessary restructuring of special and regular education. Exceptional Children 53: 391-98.

Roach, B. 1995. Supporting inclusion: Beyond the rhetoric. Phi Delta Kappan 77: 295-299.

Rosenberg, M. 1995. Responsible inclusion of students with disabilities. Paper presented at the Study Conference on Cued Speech, 25-27 May, Malay, Perpustakaan, Malyaysia.

Schumm, J. and Vaughn, S. 1995. Getting ready for inclusion: Is the stage set? Learning

Disabilities Research and Practice 10: 169-179.

Skrtic, T.M. 1987. An organizational analysis of special education reform. Counterpoint 8(2): 15-19.

Stainback, S. Stainback, W., and East, K. 1994. A commentary on inclusion and the development of a positive self-identity by people with disabilities. Exceptional Children 60(6): 486-490.

Vaughn, S. 1995. Students' views of instructional practices: Implications for inclusion. Learning Disabilities Quarterly 18: 236-48.

Welch, M. 1996. Teacher education and the neglected diversity: Preparing educators to teach students with disabilities. Journal of Teacher Education 47(5): 355-366.

Will, M. 1986. Educating children with learning problems: A shared responsibility. Exceptional Children 52: 411-415.